No 21

More Plain English.

IN

Two Other SERMONS

FOR

Reformation of Manners.

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More Plain English.

IN

Two SERMONS

Preach'd

For Reformation of Manners:

In the Year 1701.

The First

At St. *Catherine's* by the *Tower*;

The Other

At St. *Matthew Friday-Street*;

At the Request of some Gentlemen of the Societies for Reformation.

By WILLIAM BISSET, *One of the Ministers of St.* Catherine's *by the* Tower.

With a Large PREFACE *by the Author in his own Vindication.*

LONDON:

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THE

PREFACE.

HAving receiv'd Assurance (and that from Good Hands) that a Discourse lately publish'd, and entituled, Plain English, has met with some Success and Acceptance in the World, (more than I durst have expected) I am the rather encourag'd to send these Two Plain Discourses (tho' not at first designed for the Press) on the same Errand, being upon the same Subject; the one fitted to stir up the Spirits of Reformers, the other to stop the Mouths of Scorners, who hate to be Reform'd; and intended with the same Sincerity, to promote the Great and Seasonable Work of Reformation. And that they will not altogether miss their End, I have some Ground to hope, because I have been formerly assured by those Worthy Persons (whose Displeasure I have since incurr'd) that some part of the first (which at their Desire

I printed in an Half-sheet, to be given away as they sa occasion) has prov'd not a little serviceable to their De sign; and 'tis not unlikely that the same, or greater Suc cess, may attend it entire.

The other Sermon I preach'd at their Request, but th have desired me to let the World know, that it was in the Private, and not in their Publick Capacity, as Membe of the Societies for Reformation of Manners: *An I will add, for their further Vindication, before they kne (or could know) what manner of Spirit I was of.*

For now some think it is for their Credit and Intere (and I am not much concern'd to thwart their Design), have me pass for an Interloper: *Though I must ou 'tis only from a very few at the Top that I have had th Rebukes; who being much conversant with Great Perso are asham'd ('tis like) of any thing so ill-bred and u courtly, as* Plain English, *or Truth without Disguise; a of having such* Bunglers *amongst them, as cannot R form the World,* without Offending it. *So true is th Remark of our Divine Mr.* Herbert,

Gold and the Gospel never did agree,
Religion always sides with Poverty.

But 'tis not their, nor any Mens Censure, shall persuade m that I have no Part nor Lot in this Matter; *or pr vail with me to desist from what I know is my indispe sible Duty; and wherein, perhaps, I have acted as sin cerely, and with as good Warrant, as any of my Censu rers; and what I am as much concern'd as any, to see t Success of; for all the Hopes I have in this Life, depe upon it, and must stand or fall with it.*

Th

They must be blind to a great degree, who cannot dis-n a Black and Threatning Storm to hang over our ds; that the Enemy comes on like a Flood, *and but too likely a Prospect of carrying all before him: that if ever this Storm blow over,* these Proud aters be stay'd, *it must be by engaging the Lord of ts* to stand up for our Help: *For he that trusts to* Arm of Flesh, *that is, to* Fleets, *and* Armies, leans upon a Broken Reed; (*especially considering how merous, how united our Enemies are; and, what is to , and many others, the greatest Damp, what desperate ickedness and Prophaneness reigns among our Forces both Sea and Land); in which, if our Adversaries can pass us, they must have the Legions of* Beelzebub *ongst them; for sure nothing can exceed what I have n and heard my self, on this side Hell.*

And is it likely that a Blessing should attend those Arms hich are born by the open Enemies of God and Goodness? n we hope He should espouse Our Cause, *till we in d earnest espouse* His? *Can the bare Profession of the* Truth *avail us, while* we hold it in Unrighteousness? *the Possession of the* Gospel, *while we are a* Reproach *it, and seem (too many) a-weary of it, and not very willing to let it go?*

What Prospect others may have, I know not; but till a ational Reformation *be in good earnest set on foot, d vigorously pursu'd, I can see little likelihood that* the Most High should be our Defence, *or* take our part ith them that help us.

Some may expect great matters, by casting all that are for Ceremonies, out of Publick Employments for ever, engrossing all Places of Worldly Profit or Honour to Church; *as if* Christ *were not of the same Mind st as when he said,* My Kingdom is not of this Wor *And methinks they suspect their Interest in the next, w think 'tis best to be sure of something, (and get as f and full hold of this as they can) by making the Holy Sacr ment an effectual Engine of State, (an Use which is ma of it no where else, and for which I conceive it was nev design'd); and by obliging all Publicans, and a Multitu of Sinners (for some such will ever be in Office while t World stands) upon pain of Poverty, to receive it so ma times in a Year. As if* the World did not lye in Wic ednes, *and* Christ's *were not* a little Flock; *or Office could confer Grace, or any have a Right to t Great Seal of the Covenant without it; and consequen ly, there were no danger of prophaning that Awful M stery, and eating and drinking Damnation to themselve And wo be to Poor Ministers! who must so often* giv that which is Holy to Dogs, *or else deprive the poo Wretches of their Livelihood, and hazard their own, b endless Prosecutions. If these are the best Methods Atonement wherewith to appease a justly-incensed God and regain his Favour, when we so much need it, I mu needs say, I very much doubt the Success; and perhaps w may find, when these Expedients are try'd,* For all thi his Anger is not turned away, but his Hand i stretched out still.

And I cannot think it any of the best Signs, that ou Notion of the Church *is so strangely alter'd from what i was in the Days of our* Forefathers; *that the Standar*

of

of it, viz. The Form of Sound Words, *is in a manner laid aside as an* Almanack *out of date, and the main Stress laid upon Points that (to say the least) are foreign to it: That* Arminian Doctrine, *and* Popish Ceremonies, *(between which there is a near Relation, even* the Jesuits themselves being Judges) *must make a* Protestant of the Church of England; *when* Arminius *himself, by the best and greatest of our Church, has been styl'd* an Enemy of the Grace of God, *and his Disciples declared by our Parliament*, 5 Car. I. Capital Enemies to the Kingdom.

Many of those who arrogantly call themselves the Church, and by some Artifices are grown considerable (though not so much as they would be thought), are indeed the greatest Dissenters from it (whose Principles I know) amongst us. For if to add and alter, be worse (as implying a Bolder Presumption) than to diminish, certainly those who change the Doctrine, and bring in new Rites of their own, without any Warrant from Authority, are wider from the Establish'd Church, *than those who only scruple two or three Ceremonies, which all Parties confess in their own nature to be indifferent: And 'tis strange, that when all Wise Men (as every one knows) are not much for Ceremonies, either in or out of the Church,* the only Wise God *(as they'd have us believe) should be so exceeding fond of 'em, as to unchurch all who had as lieu let them alone, though they are not of his, but of Man's devising: Nay it is not enough to* admit *them, unless we also* admire *them, and lay the main stress of our Zeal upon them, even before* the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, Faith, and Love *to God and Man.*

Indeed

Indeed the very Principle that these Persons labour to establish as their Chief Corner-stone, *is, that* Human Additions *are of equal force and value (I wish many did not hold them at a much higher rate, and make more a-do about them) than* Divine Institutions. *Which Point being once yielded (and he is* no Churchman, *or what is worse, a* Low-Churchman, *with some, that denies it), it will soon open a Gap large enough for* Popery *to enter with Flying Colours, and all its Pompous Train of Fopperies and Formalities: For if we may add four or five without the Word of Command, why not* 500, *when commanded?*

And methinks some People seem to be aware which way the Wind sits, and therefore to join as near to Rome *as they can, that they may not have too large a Stride to step over at last, they grumble that our Religion is no more Ceremonious, and therefore must add some Trimmings of their own: And some, that our Government is not more Absolute, and so nearer the* French *Mode, that they may not have all their Lesson to learn together. And 'tis not unlikely they may have one Day their Fill of both, and find, to their Cost, they have* brought a Yoke upon their Necks, which neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear. *This I am very sure of, that the only effectual way to prevent such an heavy Judgment, (waving Disputes about lesser Matters, which are not* the Things that belong to our Peace) *is, to* turn unto him from whom we have deeply revolted; to purge the Filthiness out of our Skirts; *and as our Lord prescribes,* Mark 9. *&c.* Have

Salt

Salt in our selves, and have Peace one with another.

Having thus opened the design of these Sheets, I must now add something in my own Defence; and try a little to clear off old Scores, before I begin new. As to my former Piece, I have heard yet no fresh Objections rais'd, but only the same somewhat enlarged and improved. As to the Truth, it stands yet unattack'd. But what I cannot sufficiently express my surprize at, as if the World were revers'd and at cross purposes, Those are grown now (however it comes to pass) most tender of the Honour and Majesty of Religion, whom I'm sure have least to do with it. Several Persons of Eminent Piety have exprest their good liking of, and thank'd me for that small Mite I have cast into the Corban. *But it seems the fine People at t'other end of the Town (who use not to be over-streight-lac'd) are greatly Offended, that it is not Grave, and Godly enough; I know not whether they mean, to* Read *or to* Ridicule. *But I fancy the true Quarrel is, that they like not to have their delicate Ears grated with harsh Truth, which are wont to be tickled with the smoothest Flattery.*

I confess the Style is somewhat free, and 'tis the first Essay I ever made in that kind; and if it be guilty of too much Pertness *(for* Wit *I dare not pretend to) it were better* too Pert *than* too Dull. *I know these Censurers care not how large a* Dose *of that* drowsy Ingredient *goes to Sermons, that they may the better Sleep or Talk, or be otherwise Diverted, while they are Preaching, and be never under any Temptation to read them. And Booksellers know to their Cost, what a* Drug *those Solemn Discourses are, which (as some handle the matter) so tenderly touch the Sins of the Age, and keep at*

such

such a nice and decent Distance, that 'tis hard to know whether they are meant or not; and no one feels himself Gall'd by 'em, nor many much Affected any way: And therefore (as I have often observ'd) these Celebrated Performances, even before the Court and the Parliament, keep their Posts Years together on the Booksellers Stalls, without any disturbance.

I conceive, upon weighty Subjects I am Serious; but when I have Players, Scoffers, and Rakehells to deal with, I don't think I owe the Devil *so much Respect, as to treat him with a profound Reverence. There are in it, I own, some Ironical Passages; and 'tis a Figure (every one knows) very frequent in Scripture; and I dare take a liberty, for which I can produce so Authentick a Pattern. I'm sure there's nothing Wicked or Immodest to be met with; and that's perhaps the main of their Quarrel; who are so used to the* Ribaldry *and* Blasphemy *of the Stage, that nothing else is able to please them. 'Tis strange, their Palates can so much vary; nothing too Lewd for them on* Saturday-*Night; and on* Sunday-Morning, *nothing Grave and Formal enough. But this I dare affirm, if the pretended Lightness of some Passages Offend them, 'tis not because they look too like* Jests, *but because they are* True Ones.

But there's another more heinous Crime laid to my Charge, in comparison of which this is but a venial Fault; viz. *That I appear too Favourable to* Dissenters; *and* Moderation *of late is with many a Mortal Sin, and what they can never heartily forgive.*

For God or for Baal, *is now the Word; and to* give any Quarter, *is in their account to* Desert. *Had this*

his been on the same side, and in the same strain with Sach---l's *celebrated Piece, and* breath'd out Threatnings and Slaughter, *I might like him have run on as much as I pleas'd, and there had been no harm done; but* to spare the Amalekites, *is the unpardonable Offence, and no less than High-Treason against the* Church.

Now I must confess that Malice was never any Article of my Faith, nor part of my Religion; nor can I think it my Duty, (while that Declaration is in force, 1 Joh. 3. 15. He that hateth his Brother, is a murderer) *on any such account to Hate or Hurt my Brother, or wish him any otherwise than my self. Especially such whose Faith is sound, and sounder than many who would make the Church their own Monopoly, even according to their own subscribed* Scheme; *and I think their Conversation not less Strict and Blameless: And what cause have I to fall out with them, when God has commanded me* to live peaceably with all men, especially such as are of the houshold of faith?

Tho' if it were ever seasonable to jangle upon the account of some different Modes *of Worship, when the* Object, End, *and* Substance *is the same; 'tis not, I am sure, at this time of day, when All is at stake, and we must sink or swim together; when Quarrelling may help to over-set the Vessel, but can never secure it. But some are of the spiteful Man's Mind in the Fable; who so he might but see his Enemies End of the Ship Sink first, care not how soon after all went to the Bottom.*

Before I conclude, I must retract a Passage or Two, wherein I might seem to charge our Spiritual Courts with

too

too much Remisness; but they have since given me to understand, That they can be Severe (when they see their time), and that to Extremity.

I have a Living in the Country (which I had no great Mind to meddle with, and did at length Accept with some reluctance): I reside upon it near Two Parts in Three of the Year, which is more by above half than the Law requires; and because I am forc'd to my own Vindication, I may venture to say, I not only perform the Duty of my Place, but, what perhaps adds to my Crime (it did in Archbishop Laud's *Reign), have given them a Supernumerary Sermon, dispers'd some Godly Books amongst 'em, put most of their Children to School, and as I've had Opportunity, conferr'd with, examin'd, and instructed 'em in private: But these Phanatical* Works of Supererogation (*however the* Popish *fare*) *are look'd on with an Ill Eye. When I am absent, by reason of my Charge in Town, 'tis duly supply'd by a stated Assistant; and so I thought my self out of the reach of their Resentment. But since* Plain English *came out, there happen'd an Archdeacon's Visitation, which I could not be at; and though my Assistant acquainted them, that I was detain'd in* London, *where I had but very lately Buried my Father; and was withal oblig'd to attend a Chapter there; and 'tis near 60 Miles off: Yet all would not serve. A Young Gentleman (who it seems has the Power of Church-Censures, and the Rule of the Ministry; Commissary, or Official, or Chancellor they call him, some Foreign Term that I never met with from* Genesis *to* Revelations) *was pleas'd to Suspend me; and for the greater Solemnity, in* Open Court *to declare me Suspended; and the Country-People, who do not understand their hard Terms, had got it by the end, that I was*

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Excommunicated. An Hardship which I challenge all the Protestant Churches in Christendom *to Match; nay, I doubt whether the Pope's Clergy is ever insulted by their Haughty Superiors at the same Tyrannical rate. But Popish Tyranny, and Popish Trappings would make our Church in some Men's Opinions the Glory of the Age. I have been present at many Visitations, (nay, have scarce miss'd 4 in 10 Years) and observ'd what has past; I have known half the Clergy absent, (especially on a Rainy-day); nay, some that in Five Years time have not once appeared; but never any such thing done, or so much as threaten'd: So far from this, if 'twere one well Benefic'd, and of the* Right Stamp, *the Answer was, I hope he's Well; pray, my Humble Service to him. But if a Man be tainted with* Moderation, *the greatest Affronts and Indignities are too good for him. If this be not* Lording it over the Lord's Heritage, *I know not what is. But they are much mistaken, if they think I had not* counted my Cost, *before I resolv'd to speak* Plain English. *I look'd for no Quarter, but all the Wrongs and Oppressions that a prejudic'd Party, that is Gall'd with Truth, can offer: And I know those Courts are not ty'd to the dull Formality of Juries. And if they will further wrest my Benefice from me, I shall not tug hard; for the less I have, the less I am to account for: And I care not how light I pass through the World: But this is my Comfort in all,* The Will of the Lord be done.

The Author being at a Distance from the Press, the Candid Reader is desired to excuse some Faults that may have escap'd.

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PROV. 29. 24.

Whoso is Partner with a Thief hateth his own Soul: he heareth Cursing, and bewrayeth it not.

THE reason why I have pitch'd upon this Text at present, which seems to lye somewhat out of the way, and has perhaps by very few been either well-heeded, or rightly understood; is because it lays before us a Duty, (and a very weighty binding Duty) which not one in an Hundred seems to be aware of; and acquaints us with a Sin (and a great one too let me tell you) which most People fancy to be none at all, (or sure they could not sit so easie under the Guilt of it) and that is *to hear Cursing or Swearing, and not bewray it*: Or to speak the same thing somewhat more largely in other words, to hear God dishonour'd, I may say Blasphem'd; Publick Authority Despis'd; the Law both of God and Man impudently Broken; and take no further notice of it, but let the Offender go Unpunish'd, Unreprov'd, and by that very means Unreform'd.

And this I thought the rather needful to insist on, because we have a Task enjoined us by

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Authority, a *Quarterly Task* to read in your Ears, the Sense both of Prince and Parliament; *i. e. of the Powers which are on Earth*, to whom we are bound to yield Obedience *not only for Wrath but also for Conscience sake*; and yet as Matters go with us for ought I can see to no manner of purpose, whereby 'tis become a meer piece of Formality, a solemn Trifle, an useless Impertinence, and the ready way to make us and them fall into Contempt. And all because Men cannot see the Wood for Trees, will not be made to discern a Duty when it is set so plain before them *that he may run who reads it*, while every one shifts it off from himself; one says 'tis none of my Business, and another none of mine; and so by consequence no one's at all. And thus we are come to such a pass, that all Authority, Divine and Humane, has lost its force with us, and there is not (it seems) power enough now in Being, to hinder a Vile Wretch from *Blaspheming those Holy Names whereby we are called*, and expect Salvation, at which *the Pillars of Heaven tremble and are astonished*, and the Devils themselves are struck with Dread and Amazement. In a word, like the *Unjust Judge* in the Parable, we seem to set up for Libertines, neither *fear God nor regard Man*, and own Allegiance, and pay *Suit and Service* to none but the Devil.

That what comes to your Ears only in the name of God, and by order from him should signifie but little, is no News, nor (the Nature and Present State of Man consider'd) much to be wondered at; *for the Carnal mind is enmity to God, and is not subject to the Law of God nor indeed can be.*

But

But 'tis somewhat strange, and unaccountable, how the Commands of Humane Authority come to be sunk so low with us, and so little regarded; that an Act of Parliament, or the Queens Proclamation should signifie no more with us, but stand for as arrant a Cypher, as if it were a *Sermon* or an *Homily*; which when they have given the hearing too, most People are apt to think the Business is at an end. It does not surprize me *as tho' some strange thing happened to us* to make every Month a Solemn Invitation to the Lord's Table, and to press the Charge for a due Preparation, and give the plainest Directions how to prepare; and yet when all this is done, not to have one Soul more than before, and those that do come, not a whit better prepared; because Custom has Taught People to look upon all this as a matter of course, and to heed it accordingly: Or to Preach a Sermon against Drunkenness, and have some go directly to the Ale-house, and pass their Censures on it over a Pot: Or of Sanctifying the Sabbath, and the greater part of the Assembly the next thing they do to Prophane it: For Sermons we know have but slender Authority; no more then what People will be pleased to allow them, and that to be sure shall be little enough of all conscience.

But to read a Charge from our Lawful Governours, to whom most have Sworn, and all confess that they owe Allegiance, and for this to be as little regarded as the other, is what I confess my self unable to Account for; and the least I can say is, *My Brethren these things ought not*, and in other Cases us'd not *so to be*. To know that

such a Crime is Condemn'd by the Law, and Provision made to Punish and Suppress it; and though it be committed Thousands of times every Day, not to have one Example made in a Month, nay in some places in a Twelve Month; when the Magistrate is oblig'd, and ready too upon due Information to proceed against them: For my part, I cannot imagine how as *Christians* or *Subjects* we can satisfie our Conscience upon the Point, so as not to come in for a share of the Guilt, and *make our selves partakers of other Men's Sins*; especially since the whole effect of the Law depends upon our faithful discharge of this Duty; and unless Private Persons will do their part by Informing the Magistrate, 'tis morally impossible those crying Sins which draw such a Load of Guilt on our Souls, and (as we have reason to fear) such a Load of Divine Wrath and Judgments on our heads, should ever be Discountenanc'd, much less Suppress'd.

And indeed (as I have often thought with my self), there is no one Instance which proves more clearly that sad and shameful truth, so often Inculcated in the Gospel; *viz.* the Cursed Enmity of Man to his Maker; the stubborn Denial of his Right in us and Authority over us; then the Case we have now before us.

If the *Powers that are on Earth* should *decree the most unrighteous decrees*, and even *establish Iniquity by a Law* (which has but too often come to pass) 'tis odds, but it meets with a general and punctual Obedience, *Micah* 6. 16. *The Statutes of Omri are kept, and all the Laws of the house of Ahab.* If they shew their Authority in matters in-

indifferent (which are in themselves neither Good nor Evil), their pleasure we find is duely comply'd with, or if it be at any time Disobeyed, 'tis Modestly, Silently, and as it were by Stealth, because in such Cases there wants not those who are ready to appear and give evidence against the Offender. But if it be in matters of Religion or Morality, wherein God himself is the Party directly concern'd, and his Honour and Authority to be secured from Publick Outrage and Contempt; Let Parliaments pass it into Acts, the Queen and Council inforce it by repeated Proclamations, and both *Ministers* and *Magistrates* press the Execution to the utmost of their power, 'tis all in vain; few we find will stir in it, or trouble their heads about it: Such Crimes may be committed with Impunity in the sight of the Sun, and the face of the World: Not one in a Thousand has the Courage or the Conscience to bring the Blasphemer to an Account, and make him suffer the Law, though a very mild and easie Penalty, as being provided by Man, who is never for straining too high in the Cause and Quarrel of his Maker; and thus all becomes of no effect, the whole Provision but a meer Mockery, an harmless Scare-Crow, and the Law of the Land no less than that of God, *as a sounding Brass or a tinkling Cymbal*; a Sport and May-game instead of *a Terror to Evil doers.* The very Statute it self, because God is a Party to it, forfeits its otherwise unquestion'd Authority, and the most Loyal think not themselves bound to Obey. So that to *Bury in Linnen* (as the World goes) is a matter of far more dangerous consequence then to *Blaspheme*;

the Penalty a Hundred times greater, and a Thousand more likelyhood of Discovery.

The true Cause of all which monstrous Absurdities is no other but this, that Men seem generally of this mind, and to act by this very Dutiful Principle; e'n let God plead for himself and maintain his own Honour and Interest as well as he can; *for Gallio cares for none of these things.* And the same Argument that *Joash* useth in his Sons defence, when the People in a vehement fit of Zeal demanded *Gideon* to present Death for having Violated the Wooden Majesty of *Baal*, People seem to plead in their Makers Quarrel, when his Laws and Ordinances are trampled under foot; *Judg.* 6. 31. *And Joash said unto all that stood against him will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? if he be a God let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his Altar*; I may Subjoin for our present purpose, because one hath *Prophaned his Name, or Broken his Sabbaths.*

Wherefore to set our Apprehensions right as to these matters, in order to the faithful discharge of our Duty, I shall endeavour to make it appear from our Text,

First, That He *who heareth Cursing and bewrayeth it not*, is as deep in the Guilt as he who is a *partner with a Thief*, or Privy to his Unlawful Practices, and will not discover them.

Secondly, That it is equally true of both, that such a *Confederate in Sin*, is not only false to his Maker, but also wrongeth his own Soul, and so by a fair Construction may be said *to hate it* as well as his Neighbours in *suffering Sin upon him.*

Thirdly, I shall inforce this Duty from such other

other Considerations, as either arise from these, or fall in with them.

First, Then I doubt not to make it plain even to Demonstration, that he who is Privy to Cursing, (and the reason I conceive is the same for Swearing also) has the same Guilt to Answer for before God (I wish I could say too the same Scandal before Men, pray God it may once come to that pass, and then we may hope to see the World fairly amended) as he who is *partner with a Thief*, who knows of the Foul Practices of an Highway-Man, or House-Breaker, and will not Detect or give Evidence against him; nay, I will venture one step farther, as he who is Privy to high Treason, and will not Convict, or bring the Traytor to condign Punishment.

I know such Doctrine will make some Stare, others Storm, and many Smile, or Scoff at it: But 'tis as true as God is in Heaven, and *his word shall Judge us at the last Day*; for proof of which strange Assertion, (*but if it be strange to this People should it be strange to me saith the Lord*) I desire you but to grant me this one Principle; which however if you will not, I shall make bold to take for Granted; and let him who has Impudence enough, or Sense little enough, deny it if he can, that God is greater then Man, even those of whom he *has said ye are Gods*, his Crown and Dignity of greater consequence, and therefore more tenderly to be treated then theirs. And that the Supream Lord *the Possessor of Heaven and Earth*, has a clearer and stronger Title to his Glory in the World, and the *honour due unto his name*, then we can have to our Goods and Chattels, or whatever

ever we most claim a Property in: And consequently, that to Invade or Rifle the former, is of the Two the bolder Robbery and baser Injustice: Sacriledge being confest on all hands to be by far the worst kind of Theft. That the wrong is full as great, we must be very partial to our selves if we deny; for to *render to God the things that are God's*, sounds full as reasonable (to say the very least) as *to render to man the things that are man's*; unless we can imagine our Claim under him, (and we pretend to no other) is stronger then his Eternal Right, and he that Invades it, more Injurious.

And that the Guilt is as great, God who is the only Judge of that, has abundantly given us to understand; and being, as he declares, a *jealous God, who will not give his Glory to another*, we must needs conclude, he will resent more highly the Loss of his own Honour, then of our Moveables and sorry Possessions; and proceed more severely against the Wrong-Doer. In both Cases, the Sin is truly and properly against God, and none else; as *David* confesses in his own case (though *Uriah* was manifestly the Party Injured) *Psalm* 51. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned, &c.* and that of the two which strikes most directly at him, we have all the reason in the World to conclude, will be most provoking.

This we are sure of that the *Third Commandment* is every whit as Solemn as the *Eighth*, and has a more awful Sanction to inforce it; and we have as great reason to conclude, that *God will not hold him Guiltless that taketh his name in vain*, as him who *taketh his Neighbours Goods* (whether

by

by Fraud or Violence) *and payeth not for them:* especially, since Humane Laws have provided such effectual Penalties for the one; but for the other, except an inconsiderable Mulct, which is next to nothing, and bears no proportion to the Crime, have left it wholly to God, and *shall he not visit for these things?*

But there is another manifest respect in which *he that heareth Cursing and bewrayeth it not* is exactly like him that's *Partner with a Thief*, and may be said with strictest Truth to have an Hand in down-right Robbery (for let me say what I can as to the former, Men will count it no Robbery to make bold with their Maker) and which is confest one great Aggravation of this Sin, in Robbing the Poor. Now though Forfeiture, we know, is due to them by the Law, and as soon as the Crime is committed, in strictness of Justice, 'tis truly theirs; And He who does not his part to help them to it, when it is in his Power, does indeed Rob them of it, and I may truly say in those words of the Apostle (which do more plainly reach this Case than even that he was upon) *Ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your Brethren*, and joyn in a Plot against God and the Poor, only to do the Devil a Courtesie. As on the other Hand, He who makes a Swearer pay for his Offence, does a real and double Act of Charity to the Poor, who receive the Fine without dispute; and I think the greatest of all to the Offender, it being the likelyest means to put a stop to his impious practices, and perhaps (for who knows how far it may work) to prevent his Damnation.

For

For because Sentence, Eccles. 8. 11. *against an Evil Work is not Executed speedily, therefore the Hearts of the Sons of Men are fully set in them to do Evil.* At least 'tis very likely that the Opening their Purse a few times upon this Account, will effectually teach them *to set a Watch before their Mouth, and keep the Door of their Lips.*

It may perhaps be further worth considering in point of Worldly Interest (for other Considerations I fear will weigh but little with most) how far this Expedient may go to lighten the Charge, so much complain'd of by the Covetous; and relieve the Poor at another's Cost, and make the common Enemy pay *Contributions.* For were this Fine but fairly levied, and every Oath paid for according to Law, the Poor's Rates would be vastly abated, and there would be little occasion for an Over-sess in most Parishes.

But 2*dly*, supposing all this prov'd, you undertook to prove farther that the wilful Connivance at this Crime, is even as bad as the Concealment of Treason; and so I doubt not to make it appear, admitting but the Principles before laid down, and which few can have the Face to deny. For every Presumptuous Sinner is a Rebel and a Traytor, and that against the Supreme Majesty of Heaven; the very least Sin (if known and allow'd) is a sort of Petty-Treason; but this I take to be one Species of High-Treason. For a black-mouth'd Swearer or Curser is the nearest a-kin to, if not the very same with a Blasphemer, and of this Crying and Common Sin I suppose God complains, *Isa.* 52. 5. in those strange words, *My Name continually every Day is*

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Blasphemed; which can scarce be understood in any other Sense then of this profane abuse of it: And more directly to our purpose, *Lev.* 24. 11. *Cursing* comes under the Name of *Blasphemy*, and is proceeded against with the same Severity, *ver.* 24. *Bring forth Him that hath Cursed without the Camp, and let all that heard him lay their Hands upon him, and let all the Congregation stone him*; Where we see those that heard him, durst not stifle their Evidence, lest the Guilt and Vengeance should fall on their own Heads. Now that Blasphemy is High-Treason with a Witness, there is, there can be no dispute; nor can the Devils themselves go a step beyond it. And tho' Custom strangely takes off the Horror that *Sin does not appear so exceeding Sinful*, yet I doubt not but many Prophane Wretches amongst us are Guilty in their Oaths of as rank Treason as ever was punish'd at *Tyburn*. If any can be said *to turn the Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, nay, into Malice, it belongs to them, who as if the *Gospel of his Grace*, instead of restraining, had opened a Gap to farther Ungodliness, and taught the World new terms of Sin, abuse it to supply them with more full-mouth'd and formidable Oaths: The *Great Mistery of Godliness* being exposed in this profane Dress, and made a *Mistery of Iniquity*: The precious *Death* and *Blood* and *Wounds* of our Saviour being rak'd in with greater Spite, Scorn and Cruelty, than by his very *Betrayers* and *Murtherers*, to whom can that Awful Text be more fitly apply'd, *Heb.* 10. 28. *He that despised* Moses's *Law Dyed without Mercy under two or three Witnesses, of how much sorer Punishment suppose ye shall*

be

he be thought worthy, who has Crucified to himself afresh the Son of God, and counted (or rather made) *the Blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and hath done the utmost despite unto the Spirit of Grace.*

Hence it easily follows, that to *hear Cursing and not bewray it*, is what the Law calls *Misprision of Treason*; and how heinous a Crime that is by our Law, and how heavy the Penalty, is well known to all that are acquainted with our Constitution: And if God should proceed against us by the like measures of Justice (as 'tis more than probable he will) 'twould make us tremble, and beware how we come near the very borders of this Guilt: And we should rather venture the hard Thoughts, or Words, or Looks of a Wretched Worm, than *fall into the Hands of the Living God.*

And now I would gladly hear what can be alledg'd besides Custom and Common Opinion (the weakest Arguments in Nature, and of no weight at all with a Wise Man) why the Concealment of a Robber, or a Traytor, is less Criminous and Scandalous than of a Prophane Swearer; or why it should less become, or behove us to prosecute one than the other. *We ought* certainly *to obey God rather than Man*, and much more both together when their joynt Commands (as in the present case) are laid upon us.

Besides, the Life of a Man in the former cases is struck at, and most are loath (and there is somewhat plausible in the Plea) to have an Hand in Blood. But here Compassion cannot with-hold us from our Duty: Nay if we have any Compassion to the Poor, our own, or even the offenders Soul, it must needs oblige us to it: for 'tis

but

But a light Penalty to his Purse, or if that fail to his Person; but may prove an unspeakable advantage to his Immortal part, and prevent as many Stripes, and Torments in Hell, as he would have vented Curses and Blasphemies on Earth, if not thus timely stopt in his desperate Career.

But 'twill be answer'd perhaps, the case is not paralel, and therefore the Argument not concluding: Interest obliges us to prosecute Thieves, *&c.* because if such Courses are not suppress'd, it may be our own turn to be Rob'd next; and therefore here we act in our own Defence: but to inform against a Common Swearer, wards off no Danger from our selves, nay 'tis the likelyest way to be Curst for our Pains: (as for that Danger *Solomon* has assured us, *Prov.* 26. 2. *The Curse causeless shall not come*) or if it fall any where 'twill be on their own Heads. But is it no Danger to lye under the just and heavy Displeasure of God? And no Wisdom as well as Duty to lend an helping Hand to remove it? Are we not concern'd in Interest to avert the *Curse of God*, by *casting out the Cursed thing from amongst us*? Jer. 23. 10. *For because of Swearing* (in the Margin Cursing, and doubtless both) *the Land Mourneth:* And is it not worth our while to turn our Mourning into Mirth? And in this Case to partake of the common Blessing, as in the other of the common Security.

As to what was said of Treason, it may perhaps be reply'd, To make such a Discovery, where the Publick is concern'd, is the way to be well Rewarded; as the Concealment may cost us all we are worth, our Estates, our Liberty, if not our

our Lives. But for informing upon this Statute of Treason, where shall we have our Thanks? Who will Commend us, much less Requite us for it? What are we like to get but our Labour for our Pains?

I answer, you will have the Gracious acceptance of God, the Thanks of the Government and all good Men; and (what is the highest Praise) the ill word of the Devils Crew, who may grin and snarl but cannot bite; you'l have further the highest Reward imaginable, even Christ to *confess you before God and his Angels*, because you durst own and appear for him *in this Wicked and Adulterous Generation.* He seems now to Summon, or rather Court us to his Party in those words of *Jehu*, 2 Kin. 9. 32. *Who is on my side? Who?* But alas there is a very slender appearance, and he may almost complain as St. *Paul* in *Nero's Court*, 2 Tim. 4. 16. *No Man stood with me, but all Men forsook me*, and I may subjoin in the following words, *I pray God it may not*, but I am afraid it will, *be laid to their Charge.*

But we are loath, will some say, to turn *Informers*, that Name sounds ill, and may breed ill Blood between Us and our Neighbours. I warrant, like School-Boys we are afraid if we side with our Master against the naughty pack, we shall be look't on with an ill Eye, and branded for Tell-Tales; and indeed *so Foolish are we and Ignorant*, as our Saviour fitly compares *the Men of that Generation* (and 'twill suit this too) *to Children sitting in the Market-place, and saying to their Fellows, we have piped unto you and ye have not danced*, and we must in Civility Dance after their Pipe, lest we

we displease them: *And follow a Multitude to do Evil*, and so in effect strike a League with Sin, rather then have the hard Thoughts of Sinners.

But I pray, why that odious Name of *Informers* here any more than in case of Murder, Robbery, Treason, Perjury, Cozenage, *&c.?* An *Informer* in the ill Sense, is one who like the *Sycophants* heretofore, lays upon the catch to *trepan* his Neighbour, and takes advantage of his Weakness or Ignorance, nay too often of his Innocence and Simplicity, to hamper him in some penal Law, and make a Prey of him by such Officious Information. But here's no such matter, nor any thing like it; The Gain is the Poor's, and I'm afraid that's one reason 'tis so lamely follow'd, or rather laid aside, that there's nothing to be got by't (tho' withal 'tis not a small matter that could hire us to disoblige the Devil) and so we can have no end but the Glory of God, and the discharge of our Duty. Nor is the Offence a little Nicety, or Punctilio in Law; but a flaming Villany, an impudent defiance of God, and the Government, and all the Powers both in Heaven and Earth; a Brutal breach of all Honest Tyes, both of Grace and good Manners; the Bane of all civil Conversation; in a word, a Crime of that size that 'tis a Thousand pities it should be treated with no greater Severity.

The next point which I undertook to prove from our Text was this: That as *he who is Partner with a Thief, so he who heareth Cursing and bewrayeth it not, hateth* not only his *Brothers Soul*, in that *he suffers Sin upon him*, Lev. 19. 17. but *his own Soul too*, he does so by consequence if not directly,

rectly, he does it the greatest mischief imaginable, *i. e.* he makes himself *partaker of other Mens Sins*, and puts himself in the likelyest way *to partake of their Plagues*: He brings himself in for a share in the Guilt; and 'tis highly probable, (nay past all doubt, unless a timely Repentance prevent it) will come in too for a share of their Punishment: and be *consumed in all their Iniquity*. And who that has any true Love for his own Soul, and would consult either its present Peace, or Eternal Happiness, would bring such a load of Guilt on his Conscience, and such a load of Curses on his own Head, when the discharge of so plain and easie a Duty, which costs us so little, and wherein we have the Law, and the Magistrate on our side, and all the Encouragement and Protection that can be desired, both from God and Man, might surely prevent it.

Alas! We little consider what an high Crime, and Misdemeanour it is to be cold in the Cause of God, and unconcern'd for his Honour in the World! What a Confounding Charge it will be at his Tribunal, when the Secrets of all Hearts shall be laid open, and all the Passages of this Life reviewed, to have it appear that we were aiding and consenting to such and such enormous Impieties. That *the Name of God was Blasphemed through us*, because we shewed no concern to prevent, and so did what in us lay to promote it. When our Mouths shall be stop'd with that reply, and thereby all our Pleas of Personal Innocence silenc'd, Psal. 50. 16. *But unto the Wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to take my Covenant in thy Mouth, seeing thou hatest Instruction and casteſt my words be-*

behind thee, when thou sawest a Thief then thou consentedst with him, &c. It is a very great mistake, (tho' such as commonly prevails) that we can be guilty of no other Crimes but what we commit; and have nothing to answer for what we had no Hand in: Whereas our Ears, and our Eyes may in some Cases be as deep almost in the Guilt as our Hands, or our Tongues; unless we take due care to clear, and acquit them: We can't hinder such Crimes being committed, but we may their escaping unpunish'd. It was a weighty Petition of an Holy Person, and what bore a constant part in his Prayers, *Forgive me O Lord my other Mens Sins.*

Silence is taken in such Cases, and (there is good reason for it) to give consent, and he that consents to an unlawful Deed is in the same class with him that commits it. We know very well that thus it is in other matters: He who is taken in Company with Murtherers, Robbers, Coyners, or other Criminals, while they are acting their unlawful designs, and does not signifie his abhorrence at the time; nor come afterwards in of his own accord, and appear against them; is presum'd to be an Accomplice; whether he acted any part or no, and fares no better than the rest of the Gang. Nor did I ever hear any Objection against the fairness of such a Proceeding, but all the World confesses it is according to Justice. And why should we suppose that God will not proceed by the same Measures! That what is Reason, and Equity in Humane Courts, should appear hard measure at the Judgment-Seat of Christ? Especially since the *Law of God is Spiritual*, and goes much further than Human Laws

can; reaches the Thoughts as well as the Actions, and needs not (as in our Courts) either *Evidence* or *Overt-Act* to prove us Guilty. I doubt not in the least, but the Indictment will lye at his Bar, no less against those who silently connive at the Blasphemous Contempt of his Name, and Majesty, and shew no concern about it; than those who offer such outrage to it. But *we are sure that the Judgment of God is according to Truth against them which commit such things*, and therefore let them look to it who can patiently see and hear them committed, to whom I may apply that awful passage, for it belongs to them, *Rom. 1. v. ult. Who knowing the Judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of Death, not only do the same*, but (as the Original may be render'd) *consent with them that do them.*

'Twill strangely startle many a formal Hypocrite, or lukewarm Professor, who is not for being *over-much Righteous*, or concerning himself in the Cause of God farther than needs; and thinks it sufficient that he has no ill words in his own Mouth; while he pleases himself with the *Pharisees* boast in the Parable; *Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other Men, Swearer*, &c. to find some Thousands of Oaths, Curses, and other horrid Blasphemies plac't to his Account, yet thus it will be, Jude *v.* 15. *When the Lord shall come to execute Judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly amongst them, of all their hard Speeches which ungodly Sinners have spoken against him.* So many as we patiently heard, or basely conniv'd at, we shall be taken to have own'd, and approv'd. 'Twill not serve the turn then to say;

Lord,

Lord, they were none of mine, I never had such words in my Mouth. For it may be reply'd, and justly too; Yes, you made them your own, for what have you done to Disclaim, and acquit your self of them? what proof did you give of your dislike & abhorrence? What course did you take when it was in your Power to prevent, or have 'em punish'd. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked,* he knows very well what we might do, how far we might go if we have a mind to't, and what he expects, and demands at our Hands, *for the Lord is a God of Judgment, and by him Actions are weighed. He that teacheth Man Knowledge, shall not he know? He that chastiseth the Heathen, shall not he correct?* Psal. 94. 10. When a Heathen was *Casuist* good enough to resolve this case; *Scelus qui non prohibit, cum possit, jubet. Senec.* He that forbids not a Crime when he can, in effect commands it.

If every idle word that Men shall speak, they shall give Account of in the Day of Judgment, sure then every *Treasonable Word* that they shall *hear* against the Majesty of their Maker, every Blasphemous Affront that is belch't in his Face, while they tamely stand by, and are as *a Man that heareth not, or in whose Mouth is no reproof,* will call for an otherguise Reckoning, and scarce (whatever we fancy) come off as a common failing, or a Sin of Infirmity.

There's no such thing as standing Neuters in the Cause of God, he never did, nor indeed can he, grant to a Creature such a Dispensation; *for he continueth faithful, he cannot deny himself.*

If it be pretended that 'tis not for want of good Will but only a good Assurance, not from any Principle of Enmity against him, but only from bashfulness that we appear no forwarder: this indeed mightily mends the matter; to say I would be true to God, and my Conscience, if I durst: If this be your best Plea, Hear and Tremble, ye sneaking, faint-hearted, lukewarm Professors, how far this will bear you harmless, *Whosoever shall be ashamed*, &c.

Yet this Declaration was made when the Laws and Powers on Earth were all point blank against their Duty; and instead of protecting in the discharge of it, were ready to persecute them to the Death, for daring to own it. How much heavier then must this Guilt be, when the Laws we live under joyn herein with the *One Great Lawgiver*, and not only allow it, but command it, so that we may not only with Safety, and Credit be true to our God; but we cannot be otherwise unless false to our Prince; and so lye under the Guilt of a *double Disobedience*. When all the danger we can pretend to discourage us, is the Offence, and perhaps the hard Looks or Words (for they dare go no farther) of some sorry worthless Worm, who if he should ever come to know himself, and *understand the things that belong to his Peace*, will be bound to bless God for your Charitable Care; and (as we have sometimes known it happen) to thank you heartily and confess himself bound to pray for you as long as he lives, for giving a check to his Cursed self-destroying Folly, and perhaps pulling him *as a Brand out of the Burning*.

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And now can you imagine such a danger as this sufficient to ballance the *Wrath of God*? that such a doughty Trial will hold us excus'd, for balking our known Duty? that Humane frailty will afford us here any shelter or shadow of Plea? Is this a difficulty strong enough to shock our Allegiance to *God* and his *Vicegerent*, and make us strike a League with Faction, and sneak to the Devil? What! a vile Wretch to be set against God and our Governours, and all good Christians, and Subjects too? And revolt from them rather than clash with such a piece of Clay, while he bids defiance to them all? How will it sound in the great Day of Account; Lord, I would have done my Duty (as I was convinc'd of it) and shewn my Zeal and Loyalty to thee; but I feared my Neighbour would have taken it ill, and I was loath to displease him. Indeed (may Christ say) when we come to be Arraign'd, you were sorely put to't! A very fiery Trial you had to pass through! A great streight you were reduc'd to. *A Goodly Price that I was Prised at by you*! My Favour laid in the Ballance against that of a Sinful Sot, and it wanted Weight to turn the Scale? A very nice Question, which of the two you should disoblige; and which you were bound to side with and obey, the *Son of God* or a *Son of Belial*? *Christ* and *Barabbas* in competition again? When the very same Person you would have made no Scruple to disoblige to a much higher Degree, if he had Stole from you to the *value of Ten-pence*, nay had made but a Stoppage of a *Light* or a *Watercourse*, and to have put him for the one to five times the Shame, and for the other to ten times the Charge.

But perhaps there may be another Objection that lies at the bottom, and is loath to appear, at least in its own Shape: For Cowardice is reckon'd so Scandalous, even by the *Men of this World*, who otherwise *Glory in their Shame*, that few will venture to own it, and rather than lay the blame there, will impute it to down-right Ungodliness, rather confess they have no fear of God, than too great a fear of Man, however, let it stand forth, and those who think fit, take the Benefit of it. We love to sleep in a whole Skin, and are not for exposing our selves to needless Danger, and who knows but a Boysterous Ruffian, if I should Inform against him, may Knock me o'th' Head, or do me a Mischief?

If there were any such Danger (as I am perswaded there is none) even present certain Death ought not to drive us from a known Duty: *He that Loveth his own Life more than me*, says the *Captain of our Salvation*, *is not worthy of me*. Nor can we lose our Lives, (which in a little while must be parted with) *whether we choose*, *or whether we refuse* in a better Account than Obedience to our God and King. We are bound to face the biggest Danger, and boldly to own and discharge our Duty, tho' a Tyrant threaten us with utmost Torments, and an Heathen could read us such a Lecture of Constancy, *Justum & tenacem propositi virum non vultus instantis Tyranni menti quatit solida*; and if it were a Principle of Morality, I'm sure 'tis much more of Divinity. We ought to tell an *Ahab* or an *Herod* to their Teeth, tho they have both the Law, and the Sword on their side, and a *Jezabel* and *Herodias to stir them up* to

Mis

Mischief. *Thou art he that troublest Israel*, or *it is not lawful for thee to have thy Brothers Wife.*

And indeed our very fears should oblige and embolden us to it; *because he that is higher then the highest, regardeth it, and there are higher then they.* If thou hast not the Courage to stand such a Shock, then *what wilt thou do when God riseth up, &c.* Our Cowardice here is desperate Foolhardiness; to run from the Barking of a Cur into the Mouth of a Lyon; or *like the Horse and Mule without understanding*, who start at the shadow of a Bush, and leap down a precipice. But I think in our present Case, we have no such matter to trouble our heads; we shall never get the Honour of Martyrdom this way, though we desir'd it as eagerly as *Origen* is said to have done: God will not let us upon so poor an account, suffer so deep in his Quarrel, if we are not too Wise, and wary to trust him.

And besides, that he is ingaged to stand by us, and bring us off; let me tell you for your incouragement (and I have some reason for what I say) the *Children of Belial* are greater Cowards then you are aware of, and have as little Zeal to venture their Lives, or their Purses, either in the Devil's Service, as you can in God's. I have heard of some such *blusters* and *big words*, but never yet could hear of any Execution done; (unless where a mad Multitude *incourage each other in an Evil matter*; and I am not exhorting you to ingage single with a Rabble) and to be afraid of a danger that scarce ever happened, is to be a Coward without a Precedent; and if none durst do it, what would become of us.

We see sturdy Villains prosecuted daily to the danger of their Lives, and yet neither they, when they come off, nor their Sworn Brethren in Iniquity (who yet stand at Swords Point as it were with the World, *and neither fear God nor regard Man*) have much stomach to revenge their Quarrel. Such restraints doth God lay (which I have often admir'd) on the worst of Miscreants; and so effectually does he provide, that *we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life in all Godliness and Honesty*. And we need not fear that a Twelve Penny Fine will so inrage them as desperately to venture all they are worth to be revenged of God, and the Government.

But now let me tell you, the danger on the other hand, and pray consider which is the most Terrible, that of two Evils you may choose the least, which all the World confesses is the wisest Course; If ye will not face this doughty danger, but rather let the Devil Reign without Controul then such a risque; God I can assure you will resent it, and highly too; and (unless Repentance ward off the stroke) as surely revenge it; he will treat us as Deserters, if not as downright Rebels; as those who have run from their Colours, if not, as those that have Fought against him, and *set their tongues against the most High. He that heareth Cursing and bewrayeth it not*, though he may scape the sinners, shall have God's Curse; and consider which we are best able to bear.

What has been said of this Sin, holds good in proportion with regard to all the other reigning Abuses, and corruptions of the Age, which are so rife and rampant amongst us: Against which, there

there are Laws now in force, if we would but lend an helping hand toward the Execution, that they *may have free course*, and obtain the end for which they were made: And I perswade my self, no one can be so dull, as not to perceive their Duty as binding with respect to the rest; Such as Drunkenness, Uncleanness, Sabbath-breaking, *&c.*

And 'tis an amazing Mystery to me, how Publick Officers especially, can swallow an Oath to bring all such Offences to the Cognizance of the several Courts to which they appertain; and yet see them daily committed under their Nose, and make their returns, without taking any manner of notice about them. I could not but think my self false to my trust, if not plainly Perjur'd by such Prevarication; and I suppose no one will plead in their own defence that God is the Party Injur'd, and therefore there is no harm done.

They make some Conscience in other matters, and that as they would have it thought, *because of the Oath of God*: A Whelm, a Nusance, an Inmate, and the like, they dare, and do daily Indict, (let who will be displeased) because 'tis the Duty of their place. But the *Overflowings of Ungodliness* I warrant are no *Whelm*, Riot and Drunkenness, are no *Nusance*, and the Devils Incarnate, no *Troublesome Inmates*, but very Civil, Peaceable, and inoffensive Neighbours, and 'twere a Hundred pities to molest or disturb them. But till these Abuses are reform'd, I am sure we can never expect a Blessing; and God may justly complain after all the Care and Compassion he has bestowed upon us, as he does by the Prophet of that Stiff-neck'd, Incorrigible People, which so long

tryed

tryed his Patience; *Jer.6.29. The Bellows are burnt, the Lead is consumed of the fire, the Founder melteth in vain, for the Wicked are not plucked away*; and I wish that Sentence do not ensue next; verse 30. *Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.*

FINIS.

PROV. 14. ✝9.

Fools make a Mock at Sin: —

IF we compare the Account which God has given us in his Word, of the Nature, and Effects of Sin, with the Account which is commonly made of it in the World; and turn our Eyes and Thoughts from what we Read there, to what we Daily ſee here: The ſtrange diſagreement we ſhall meet with may tempt us to think that there muſt needs be ſome miſtake or miſunderſtanding in the matter, that God means one thing by Sin, and the World another: For ſure it can never be the ſame which God ſo greatly abhors, ſo heavily condemns; and yet Mankind ſo freely commits, and too often ſo highly commends.

The Holy Ghoſt has deſcrib'd it in the moſt frightful Characters, as an heidous, horrible Monſter: The World repreſents it with taking Features, as a Comely, and agreeable Miſtreſs: The Divine Pencil has drawn it as a Gloomy Night-piece with dark Shades, Black and Diſmal as the *Shadow of Death.* The World ſets it off as a lively Frolick, with Bright Airy Colours: By the One 'tis brought on the Stage as a moſt Sad and Terrible Tragedy: By the Other 'tis Acted as a Comical Intrigue, or Pleaſant Farce, as matter of Mirth and Diverſion.

Well may we ſtart that Queſtion of *Nicodemus* upon

upon a like surprize, *How can these things be?* How shall we reconcile these flat contradictions? How shall we solve this dark Riddle? And clear our selves of this intricate Maze? Indeed I see not how. This Riddle would pose us, this Labyrinth lose us for ever, if God himself had not given us the Clue to bring us out, *viz.* That *He hath not Eyes of Flesh, and seeth not as Man seeth; That his Thoughts are not as our Thoughts, nor his Ways as the Ways of Man:* But *those things which are highly esteemed among Men are an Abomination in the sight of God.* Were it not truly thus, how could we possibly Account for the wide dissent between Man and his Maker. God has branded it with all the Marks of Ignominy, as the most Scandalous, Disgraceful thing in Nature; the foulest blot that can cleave to a Creature; the greatest, and only just cause of Shame, *v.* 34. *Sin is a Reproach to any People*: And the Prophet *Jeremy* expresses the greatest Confusion upon the review, Jer. 31. 9. *I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the Reproach of my Youth.* But the Men of the World have wash'd this *Negro* White, they have Voted it clear from any such Charge: So far is *the Reproach of it* from *being a Burthen* to them, that they can boldly *Glory in their Shame*, and instead of blushing at it, will put him out of Countenance, that shall dare to upbraid them with it.

Again, God has given us to understand, that 'tis a pregnant Evil, big with all Plagues, *a world of mischief, full of deadly poyson. How abominable then and filthy is man, that drinks up iniquity like water*, that gorges it down without Fear or Measure, nay, quaffs it off with the most voluptuous

Gust,

Guſt, as *the beſt wine that goeth down pleaſantly*, as if it were not only Safe and Harmleſs, but highly Cordial and Delicious. As if that Deſcription did not belong to it, *Deut.* 32. 31. *Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of Gall, their Cluſters are bitter: their wine is the poyſon of Dragons, and the cruel venom of Aſps.* And is it poſſible, the moſt Thirſty Feaveriſh Soul ſhould venture on ſuch a deſperate Draught, if it had the leaſt intimation of ſuch Baneful Ingredients? and yet we ſee it goes down as ſmoothly, as if the Poyſonous Nature were chang'd, or ſome Sovereign Antidote lately found out, unknown to former Ages, unknown to God himſelf, whereby to Cure its Malignity, or prevent its deadly operation. Nay, though at the laſt, they find by Experience what our Author had foretold, *Prov.* 23. 32. *It biteth like a Serpent, and ſtingeth like an Adder:* Yet as if it had the ſame effect with the ſting of the *Tarantula*; it produces a kind of *Sardonick laughter*; the Impoiſoned Wretch is tickled with the Venom, *Makes a mock of Sin* to the laſt, *ſpends his days in* Mirth, *and in a moment goes down to the Grave.*

In Diſcourſing upon this Subject, I ſhall ſhew, *First*, What are the moſt common Inſtances wherein Men are wont to *make a mock of Sin.*

Secondly, Endeavour to find out the true Cauſes (for Reaſon there can be none, and it were madneſs to expect them) of this Prophane and Deſperate Wantonneſs.

Thirdly, Make it appear that this Wicked and Wanton Humour, fairly intitles them to the Character of *Fools.*

Laſtly,

Lastly, Draw some Plain and Practical Uses from the whole.

First, Then we are to inquire what it is to *make a mock at Sin*, and upon what occasions this is ordinarily done. Where we must take the word *Sin* in the most restrained sense, as it signifies *the transgression of the Divine Law*, for so the Apostle defines it; as it implies an offence immediately against God; *Psalm* 51. 4. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned*, and what necessarily follows upon that, an injury to our Immortal Souls; for *he that sinneth against me*, says the *Eternal Wisdom*, *Prov.* 8. *ult. wrongeth his own Soul*; that is in one word, Sin as Sin, sever'd from its Foreign or remoter Consequences.

For it must be confest, that when Cloath'd with other Circumstances, and Attended with other Consequences, 'tis usually treated with more respect, and thought too solemn a thing to make a Jest of. For instance, when it touches or threatens the Carcase, that hallowed Shrine, to which Carnal Men pay all their Devotion; when it impairs the Health, breaks the Ease, or obstructs the pleasure of the Body: when it *chastens us with pain upon our Bed, and the multitude of our Bones with strong pain*.

Or *Secondly*, When it brings us under the Lash of Humane Laws, and strikes at our Liberty, Life, or Estate, or when it blasts our Credit in the World: In these Cases, few are so merrily disposed as to make a mock at Sin, unless here and there some hardened Reprobates, or profligate Wretches, who are quite sunk to the level of the *Beasts that perish*. These are it seems, *Vital*

and

and tender *Parts*, in which if it touches us, 'tis allowed to have a *sting*, and that felt to the quick. But as it only exposes to the Wrath of God, the Terrors of Conscience, and the Torments of Hell, and the rest of that Invisible Train: Alass! 'tis but brute Thunder that can neither cool their Courage, nor damp their Mirth: In this Scripture Dress, 'tis look'd on as a meer Scare-Crow, not terrible enough to fright Children and Fools, for consider'd only as such, *even Fools can make a mock at sin*, and that either 1*st*, in Others: Or, 2*dly*, in Themselves.

1*st*, In Others. This arises from Two several Springs, *viz. Spite*, or *Wantonness*. The 1*st* is, when we scornfully Upbraid and Insult over the Sins or Infirmities of our Brethren: When we make their falls the triumph of our Wit, and *so glory in their shame*. This Vice has a peculiar Name in the Greek ἐπιλαμβανία the very *reverse of Charity*, which 1 *Cor.* 13. 6. *rejoyceth not in iniquity, but rejoyceth in the truth.*

But this does not so properly belong to our present Subject as the other, which is far more common, and proceeds from *Wantonness*: When we make our selves Merry with the Sins of others, not in spite to their Persons, but in a Prophane contempt of the Sin and the Law of God, which forbids it: For Instance, when we laugh at Profane Jests, or are pleased with Lewd, and Mischievous Frolicks; or which is a practice now-a-days, become Genteel and Fashionable; draw others into Drunken Debauches, detain them by Force or Intreaty, and make them lose their reason in the Debauch. How often is this boasted of as

a kind of Victory, or Successful Exploit; and made the matter of no small Triumph. So common it is, and so peculiar to the humour of the Age, that I should have thought it one of our fresh Inventions or modern Discoveries, had not the Prophet *Habakkuk* made mention of it, and withal, denounces an heavy Wo against it, 2. 15. *Wo unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunk, that thou mightest look on their nakedness*; i. e. that they may expose themselves, and entertain their Treacherous Friends with the unhappy slips of their Supplanted Reason.

Now, what an Inhumane, as well as Unchristian Sport is this? more Cruel then the *Philistines* Usage of *Sampson*; what a dishonest Pastime! how unbeseeming a Man to be displeased with the Scandal of our common Nature! how near a Kin to one of the greatest Crimes that ever was committed! *viz.* the Sin of *Cham*, which brought a Curse on his whole Posterity, but no wonder for *Folly*, *Prov.* 15. 21. *is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom.*

We read of the Sports of the Ancient *Romans*, and that not without a just Abhorrence, who entertained themselves with the bloody Spectacle of Slaughter'd Men, and had often some Scores of *Gladiators* Sacrificed at once to that Cruel Diversion. But how much more Barbarous a Delight is it, to see God dishonoured, our Natures disgraced, Immortal Souls stain'd, their Consciences wounded, not without danger of their Eternal Death? A Diversion fit for none but *Devils*, an Humour one would think no where to be found but in Hell. But sure they will pay dear for such wanton Pleasures; for this is (if any thing)

to

to make themselves partakers of other Mens Sins in the highest degree, and therefore with highest reason to *partake of their Plagues.* To these I may fairly apply that Passage of *Solomon*, *As a Mad-man that casteth Firebrands, Arrows and Death, so is he that deceiveth his Neighbour, and saith, am I not in Sport.*

But 2*dly*, The main Instance of this impious Folly, is to make a mock at Sin in themselves; or as the Apostle expresses it, to *sport themselves with their own Deceivings.* This wanton Humor discovers it self either; 1*st*, In the actual Commission of the Sin, when it is adventured upon in a careless ludicrous manner, with an Air of Jollity and unconcern: As if it were a Matter of no moment or consequence, and did not deserve a serious thought or look. When instead of having an horror upon us, as (if our Conscience were awake) it could scarce be avoided; we rush upon it with a wild sort of bravery, and *turn to our own Course, as the Horse rusheth into the Battel*, and make as light of it when we have done. *Such*, says *Agur*, Prov. 30. 20. *Is the way of an adulterous woman, she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith I have done no wickedness.* The same was the aggravation of *Esau*'s Sin that branded him with the Character of *Prophane*, that he made no more of all the sacred Priviledges of the *First Born*, the *Priesthood*, the *Patriachs*, and the *Promises*, than a *Morsel of Bread.* Gen. 25. &c. *He did eat, and drink, and rose up, and went his way: Thus* Esau *despised his Birthright.*

Or 2*dly*, When they make a Mock at Sin in the After-relation, and take a Pride, and Pleasure in telling their Crimes, as tho' it were some

very entertaining Adventure. This some impudent Sinners can do with such a brisk air and gust, as if it were the best part of the Enjoyment, and half of the Satisfaction would have been lost without it. Did they confess them with Shame, and Sorrow as their greatest misery; 'twould be some little expiation of their Guilt: But 'tis plain their design is to move Laughter rather than Pity; it may be to fish for Applause. Nay, as if they would *make a mock at God* too as well as *Sin*, interweave ever and anon a slight, heedless, *God forgive me*, as a pretty varnish to set off the Discourse. To make a formal Narrative of their drunken Frolicks, and add some Extravagancies that were never acted to make the Story more diverting, is a piece of Wit so common now adays, that he who has none of this kind to produce, is lookt upon as a meer Cypher or Ideot, who has known nothing at all of the World. But could any one believe such prodigious Impudence? Adultery too, that abominable Offence against the Law of God, Nature, and Nations, which even Heathens punish with Death, and never mention'd but with abhorrence; is often told by way of mirth and drollery; the Party wrong'd is ridicul'd into the Bargain, and the bold Actor boasts of the Intrigue; and 'tis odds but he's cry'd up by his Comrades, as an accomplish't *Gallant*, or what the Stage represents and recommends, a *fine Gentleman*. And I verily believe, did not the Law strike some terrour, and lay some restraint upon them, Perjury and Parricide, Sacriledge and Treason, Murder and Robbery would be blanch't

over

over too at the same rate, (for *Sodomy* is already) and minc't into petty venial Miscarriages.

But 3*dly*, The main occasion of *making a mock at Sin*, is when they are sharply reprov'd for it, and seriously warn'd of the dreadful Consequences. Then is the time to summon all their Wit, and Spleen together, and make the most stout and obstinate Defence: But forasmuch as their Cause will not bear a serious reply, and Reason can stand them there in no stead; their only way left, is to ridicule their Reprover, and turn his Discourse into *Burlesque*; the last, but lame relief of a baffled Cause. And when Rage and Revenge come to their assistance, they set the keenest edge on their Wits, and inspire them with the most bitter and virulent Scoffs. That what is wanting in force of Argument may be made up in Scorn and Despite; therefore *Solomon* well observes, *Prov.* 9. 7. *He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame, and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth to himself a blot*, i. e. He shall be sure to be foully bespatter'd, and if over-modest abasht too for his pains.

Such was the usage the Prophet *Jeremy* met with from *those scornful Men which ruled that people in Jerusalem*, as he tells us, *Jer.* 20. 8. *For since I spake the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily.* Nay, *Wisdom* it self met with no fairer treatment, and that too at the hand of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, those starch't solemn Elders, who otherwise affected more gravity than became them. But when their secret Lusts were toucht, they had no other Remedy, but to lay aside the *Doctor*, and play the *Buffoon*. Luk. 16. 14. *And the Pharisees also who*

were covetous heard all these things and they derided him. Now in this Case only, even a *Wise Man* too *may make a mock, tho'* not *at Sin*, yet at *scornful Sinners*, (for God himself *scorneth the scorners, and will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh*). i.e. Return their taunts in their own *dialect, and answer these fools according to their folly, lest they be wise in their own conceit*, lest they fondly boast they have won the day, and worsted or silenc't all their Antagonists. For as *Zophar*, Job 11. 3. *Shall thy lies make men hold their peace? And when thou mockest shall no man make thee ash'm'd?* And we have the Example of *Elijah*, 1 *Kings* 18. 27. most clear, and full to our purpose. However this Course is not advisable when it may be avoided: But sometimes there is no getting clear of such foul mouth'd Adversaries without betraying the Truth. Our Saviour tho' he often *endured such contradiction of Sinners*, and (when the Case required) answered them with a just keenness and indignation; gives us this general Rule. *Cast not your pearls before swine, lest they trample*, &c. And our Author to the same effect, *Prov.* 2. 39. *Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.* It is no doubt for our ease, if not for our Honour, to engage as seldom with them as may be; for *Prov.* 29. 9. *If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh there is no rest.*

But here to give the vilest Scorners their due. It must be own'd, that in some cases they can, and usually do, refrain from *making a mock at Sin* and their friendly Reprover. For Instance, if their Physician tell them you must leave off this riotous course of Life, keep better Hours, and better

ter Orders, or you'll ſhorten your days. Or if their Councel ſhould tell them theſe unwarrantable Practices are more than you can anſwer, they'll bring you e're long into a *Præmunire*, forfeit your Head, or make your Purſe ſoundly pay for it: or a prudent Friend to this effect; ſuch a lewd ſcandalous courſe of Life will blaſt your Credit, blow up your Eſtate, and bring you to Shame and Beggery. Tho' they do not think fit to take their Advice, *becauſe wickedneſs is as a ſweet morſel in their mouths*; too ſweet to part with, and therefore *ſpare, and forſake it not:* Yet they are moſt an end, ſo far from entertaining ſuch a Monitor with ſcorn and flouts as to take, or ſeem at leaſt to take it in good part, and it may be thank them for their kind Advice. But if a Miniſter or Chriſtian Friend Argue the Caſe from ſuch Topicks as theſe; you endanger the Peace of your Conſcience, which is the beſt Friend and the worſt of Enemies, and lay your everlaſting Hope at ſtake: For be ſure, God *and your Sins will find you out*, and *'tis a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; or as *Eli* to his reprobate Youths, 1 Sam. 3. 25. *If one man ſin againſt another, the judge ſhall judge him, but if a man ſin againſt the Lord, who ſhall entreat for him.* The faireſt reply we can look for from them is; if this be all there's no great danger; we may ſpare our Preaching, God is merciful; and however they ſhall fare as well as the reſt of their Neighbours, and are not to be frighted with ſuch affected *Cant.*

I have done with the firſt Head; What it is to *make a mock at Sin.* I ſhall now proceed to aſſign ſome Cauſes (for Reaſons we cannot expect

unless we could *cum rationes in sanire*, rave by Rule, and run mad by Reason) of this wanton wicked insolence. The general Causes which equally concur to all other Sins; such as the Temptation of Satan, the Corruption of our Natures, *the Enmity of our Hearts to God by wicked works*, &c. I shall wave at present, as being too wide, and indefinite: And confine my Discourse to such as are more peculiar, and immediately productive of these unhappy Effects.

The 1*st*, and surest is an habitual Prophaneness; when *the Heart is harden'd thro' the deceitfulness of Sin*, and the *Conscience sear'd as with an hot Iron*, and like the hands of Galley-slaves by long tugging at the Oar, have contracted a *Callus* or Crust, so that they can without feeling play with Hell-fire. Then Reproofs, Exhortations, nay, and Threatnings too can make no entrance, but rebound as from a Wall of Brass in the Face of the Reprover. Many the like Effects of Custom we see every day: A raw Soldier, who when newly listed, would have trembled at the report of a Gun, and it may be swoon'd at the sight of his own Blood, when flesh'd with Slaughter, and enur'd to Danger, can run upon a Cannons-mouth, tread on heaps of slain with as little concern as if they were heaps of Stones; and make no more of killing a Man than a Dog. Many a Legion of such *hardy Veterans* has Satan in his Service; who tho' while *Novices* and Freshmen they venture with aking Hearts, and trembling Hands, on lesser Sins, can now boldly rush on the biggest Impieties; can *play on the Hole of the Asp, and put their Hand into the Cockatrice Den*; and like the *Leviathan*, Job 4. 1. *Their heart is as*

firm

firm as a ſtone, darts are counted as ſtubble, they laugh at the ſhaking of a ſpear, at all the threatnings of the Goſpel and terrors of the Lord.

To this if there be added, *2dly*, An *Atheiſtical Spirit*, (which is ſeldom found without the former) then we have an accompliſht Champion for the Devils Cauſe, arm'd at all points, and proof againſt *all the Powers of the World to come.* When once *the Fool can ſay in his Heart there is no God*, no wonder if he can without ſcruple *make a mock at Sin*: For then there would be no ſuch thing in Nature as we have defin'd it, *viz. A wrong to God and our own Souls.* And could they once make out the *Premiſes*, we would not much ſtand with them for the *Conſequence*, that they might make as bold with Sin as they pleaſe, were there no God to avenge it, nor Soul to be damn'd for it.

But they muſt firſt perſwade themſelves out of their Senſes as well as Reaſon, muſt put out their Eyes, and all the glorious Lights of Heaven, before they can ſtart a doubt of his *Eternal Power and Godhead. For the heavens declare the glory of God*, Pſal. 19. 1. *&c.* Or if they would be inform'd nearer Home, *Job* 12. 7. *Ask now the beaſts and they ſhall teach thee, and the fowls of the air and they ſhall tell thee, and the fiſhes of the ſea ſhall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all theſe that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this: in whoſe hand*, &c. Nay, to come one ſtep lower, and ſend them to Tutors of their own Temper, or likeſt themſelves. *I tell you if theſe ſhould hold their Peace, the very Stones would immediately cry out*; and proclaim the Being of their *Creator*, *God bleſſed for evermore.*

But this is indeed an Absurdity of that monstrous Vice that few I hope can stretch (tho' many would) their Reason, and Conscience wide enough to swallow it.

Therefore we must look, 3*dly*, For some more common and likely Cause of that contempt of God and Sin, which we see so common amongst us: And here the Royal Prophet's experience will furnish us exactly; *Ps.* 36. 1. *The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes;* q. d. this is the very language of his Actions, that *God is not in all his Thoughts.* For tho' 'tis exceeding hard, and next to impossible to smother the strong Perswasion that every Soul of Man has of his Existence; yet 'tis very easie, and nothing more usual than to suppress the actual Sense of his Presence; which may embolden us no less than the other to the most daring Acts of Defiance. Nothing short of a lively apprehension of the Divine Presence, will strike a sufficient aw upon our Souls for a Party that we conceive as absent and out of sight and hearing affects us no more, than if he were not at all. Whereas on the other hand, *did we set the Lord always before us*; consider of him as upon the spot, as a nice Observer, and rewarder of all our Behaviour; we could never arrive to that pitch of Impudence as to Sport our selves with the breach of his Laws, and *make a mock of Sin which his Soul hateth*, and so in effect Affront him to his Face. For as *Job* presses the same Argument. 13. 9. *Is it good that he should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, durst ye so mock God? shall not his excellency make you afraid, and his dread fall upon you?* No doubt the stoutest Sinner would find his Courage

fail

fail him, and his wanton Insolence chang'd into extream Dread and Consternation. The most impudent Malefactor will scarce play the Wanton before the Judge, how unseemly soever his Demeanor may be behind his Back. In the mean while what a silly and more than childish Weakness is it, to be concern'd at nothing but just what we see, to *wink hard* our selves, and thence conclude with them, *Is.* 29. 15. *Our Works are in the Dark, who seeth us, and who knoweth us?*

A 4*th* Cause that *Fools make a Mock at Sin*, is much of the same Nature and Original with the foregoing; *viz.* That they are wholly led by their Senses, and as they can (while so) have no lively sense of God, so neither a true sight of Sin; both which (tho' in all other respects quite contrary) yet agree in this, that they are *spiritually discerned.* Now there is that hideous Deformity, those hateful Qualities in the very Idea of Sin; 'tis such an ugly mishapen Monster, that would we once behold it in its true Colours, would rather seize us with Horror and Amazement, than minister matter of Wanton Mirth; as *Plato* was wont to say, *If Vertue could assume a Bodily Shape, and be viewed with the Eyes of Flesh, all Mankind would necessarily fall in love with it.* But now the Sensual Man can perceive no such matter; but that to the best of his Skill in *Physiognomy*, the lewdest Sinner (unless it be here and there a Carcass rotted with Lust, or bloated with Drunkenness) makes as handsome a Figure as the strictest Saint. But to illustrate the Case by an easie Comparison, How many are there who can make themselves merry with the Name of the Devil, and speak of him in a pleasant jocular way; (nay, I wish nothing

thing so monstrous had ever been heard) drink an Health to him: Whereas should he personally appear to them, there is no doubt 'twould quash their Mirth, and make their Blood curdle in their Veins. So could Sin once be view'd in its own Shape, those who now make a mock at it, would flee from it as from the Face of a Serpent, their *evil Genius* could not more affright them; and they would readily confess, *It is worse than all the Evils that ever befell them from their Youth up.*

The 5*th* and last Cause that I shall mention, and indeed the most universal Cause, why *Men make a Mock at Sin*, is a strong settled Unbelief of a future Judgment, and the Eternal Torments denounc'd in Scripture as the *Portion of Unbelievers*; an Unbelief so common, that I may say of ours as the Satyrist of his Days, *esse aliquos manes vix pueri credunt*; an Unbelief so deeply rooted, that no force of Reason, no light of Revelation, is able to overcome; and as our Saviour affirms in the Parable, *Luke* 16. *Neither will they be perswaded tho' one rose from the Dead.* That this is the *causa sine quâ non* (as the Schools term it) the Cause without which it could never be, is beyond dispute; for who that allow'd a bare Possibility, much more a Certainty of such a State, would run the risque on't? No, *surely in vain is the Net spread in the sight of any Bird.* Tho' we allow'd them the odds of ten thousand to one, the bravest Sinner would not take his chance for it; much less dally with Sin, and *sport himself with his own Damnation.* No, as soon would they take a Lion by the Tooth, or a Bear by the Beard; as soon would they affront a Tyrant in the midst of his Guards, or a Captain of a *Banditti* at the Head of his

his Ruffians, as trifle with, and mock at this *King of Terrors*, with Death, and Hell, and Eternity at its Heels. 'Tis not an excess of Courage but Infidelity, not a *fearless* but a *faithless* Spirit that makes 'em so fool-hardy. But what ground they have for such a sturdy Confidence I am not able to conceive: That God has fill'd his Word, and very often the Consciences of notorious Sinners with these awful threats of *Eternal Judgment* and Vengeance, is matter of fact; and no one ever pretended to deny it. And I cannot imagine any reason why we should not think him in good earnest. That he *is able to destroy both Body and Soul in Hell*, is abundantly plain from that absolute Power he exercises over us even at present; who, as he could make us exist without our leave or consent, so he can keep us in Being, and Misery too, whether we will or no. And as for his Will, if it were not fully resolved upon the Point, he need not, and would not have declar'd it to the World; and so made himself liable to the charge of Fickleness and Irresolution.

Tho' if he were suppos'd to relent, as not having the Heart (may some perhaps imagine) to execute so severe a Sentence; there is a better Expedient to salve his Truth and Honour, without any prejudice to his Pity and Goodness, or his Justice and Holiness either; and that is by making the change, not on his part, but on ours; by reclaiming us (as he can with ease) at present, and not by remitting the Sentence hereafter. Thus much Reason tells us, He would not have threaten'd unless he meant to fulfill; at least he would prevent it in time, and not let things come (as we see they often do) to extremity.

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He that ruleth over Men must be Just; or else his Authority would soon fall into Contempt, and be trampled upon by every insolent Offender. Wherefore even Human Laws, and *the Powers that are on Earth*, tho' liable (as all Things and Persons here) to Slackness, Partiality, and Corruption, for the most part strike sure, and even for a single Offence *the Wages of Sin and Death*, and what may we then expect from Justice it self for thousands of repeated Crimes and Contempts, but a Judgment worthy of God: *For shall mortal Man*, Job 4. 17. *be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?* Shall sinful Dust and Ashes express a greater zeal against Sin than the Holy God who *is of purer Eyes than to behold Evil, and cannot look upon Iniquity?* Indeed the only account I can give of this wretched Security, (and that a very lame one) is, that they have sinn'd themselves into a fond Presumption of Impunity; they have been so long us'd to *make a mock of Sin*, that as if all must needs be of their mind, they fancy that God will make as light of it too; at least will never call 'em to a *serious Reckoning* for what they committed *in jest* or at random; which is just for all the world, as if a Criminal should hope to find Favour of the Judge, because he has no manner of awe upon him; no regard to his Person, nor respect to the Court; but carries it with an Air of Impudence and Unconcern; (a proper Motive (is it not) to excite Compassion?) and yet this sturdy Behaviour of the Unbelieving World is the only Objection that I know of which can shock our belief of the *Eternal Judgement*.

But after all, if God should prove as good as his

his word (and who knows but he may) if he will not be jeer'd out of his Justice; if he do *continue faithful, and cannot deny himself*, nor *our Unbelief make his Truth of none effect*, but stands resolv'd *to render to every Man according to his Works*; then I may say with the Apostle, *Behold ye Despisers, and wonder and perish!* Then they have play'd a hopeful Game on't, and mock'd to some purpose! then the Scorner will be forc'd to confess, or rather plead guilty to that Indictment, *Eccl.* 10.13. *The beginning of his words is Foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous Madness:* Which brings me to

The 3d and last Head propos'd, which is but our Text revers'd or plac'd in another posture; as *Fools make a mock at Sin*, so *they who make a mock at Sin are Fools.* But here we must expect a stout Resentment, and a rough Reply; such an affront will not be easily taken, nor ever forgiven: If we say they are graceless or *desperately wicked*, they will not endeavour to wash off this aspersion; nor do they think it worth confuting: they are willing enough to be thought as bad or worse than they are; *for they declare their Sin as Sodom, and hide it not.* But to be branded for fools upon that account from whence they affect the Reputation of *Wits*, and set up for *Men of Sense*, is the greatest Baulk, the worst Disappointment that could befall them. This is the only topick upon which they can shew their Parts; and little suspect that it most miserably betrays the shallowness of their Understandings.

But that we do them no wrong, nor call them out of their Names, I appeal to all the thinking part of Mankind. For what surer Mark can there be

be of a Fool than an unseasonable and unseemly Mirth; a frothy wanton Behaviour on the most sad and solemn Occasion? when *the Heart of the Wise is in the House of Mourning, the Heart of Fools is in the House of Mirth.* What plainer sign of childish Ignorance than *to play with Edg'd-tools? It is sport to a Fool*, says *Solomon*, *to do Mischief*; and what is of so mischievous Consequence as Sin, both to themselves and all about 'em? for *scornful Men*, Prov. 29. 8. *bring a City into a Snare*; *and one Sinner destroys much Good.* Upon what occasion are they ever like to be Serious who can make themselves merry with their Sins? which (if rightly considered) are the only serious Actions they were ever guilty of in their Lives; the rest are meer Impertinencies, and turn to no manner of account; these turn to some, to a very great; but 'tis a sad and dreadful Account.

The Crafty Counsellor, the *Old Serpent*, who sets them on to make a mock at Sin, knows better himself, however he thinks fit to have them affected: He is not so frolicksome as to play with his Chains, *those Chains of Darkness wherein he is reserv'd unto Judgment*; but in sober sadness *believes and trembles.* He could tell them if it were for his turn, such tragical Stories of Sin as would dry up their merry vein, and turn it into the deepest Melancholy; as would make their Hair stand an end, and their very Hearts bleed within them. He could acquaint them what a dismal change it made in himself and his Fellow-Apostates! how it turn'd them in an instant from *Angels to Devils*, from the brightest Stars in Heaven to the blackest Brands in Hell; how it plung'd them at once from the heighth of Happiness and Glory,

Glory, to the loweſt Abyſs of Shame and Miſery. *How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning?* how but by Sin? This horrid Cloud eclips'd his riſing Glories, and chang'd that beautiful promiſing Day into the blackeſt Shades of Eternal Night.

But all this our Scorners will take time to Believe; and the time will come when they ſhall believe it in ſpite of themſelves. In the mean while let us take a view of the Havock it has made, the Tragedies it has acted on the Stage of this lower World: Againſt which Unbelief it ſelf can raiſe no Cavil, find no Exception; *and iniquity muſt ſtop its mouth. For we know*, ſays the Apoſtle, which is more than Belief, *Rom.* 8. 22. *That the whole Creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.* All Creatures ſeem to ſympathize with our Sorrows, and do Pennance for the Sins of Man. And ſhall he alone make *Merry with Sin*, for whoſe ſake the whole World about him is in *deep Mourning*.

'Tis this only *troubler of our Peace* that has raiſed a mutiny among the Elements, and broke the League eſtabliſht among them at the Creation. All the Storms and Hurricanes, Earthquakes and fiery Eruptions that have ever infeſted this lower Globe were rais'd by this accurſed Incendiary. 'Tis Sin alone that chang'd our *Paradiſe* into a Wilderneſs, nay a Dungeon, almoſt a Purgatory; 'twas this that blaſted our beautiful Spring, and nipt our Happineſs in the Bud. *Jer.* 5. 25. *Your iniquities have turned away theſe things, and our ſins have withholden good things from us:* Curſed is the Earth on the account of Sin, and ſtockt with *Thorns and Briars* inſtead of the *Fruits, and Flowers of* Eden.

den. They are the unwholesom vapors of Sin, that like a black damp from the bottomless Pit, have so often tainted our purer Air; that instead of the *Breath of Life*, we draw the contagious *blasts of Death*. 'Tis this accursed Fury, this *Boutefeu* that has so often embroiled Mankind, and set them together by the Ears: That has fill'd the World with Blood, and Cruelty, with *Violence and Spoil*, and *laid wast so many beautiful Cities into ruinous heaps*, and made the whole Earth a *Golgotha*, and *Aceldema*, *a Field of Blood*. *From whence came Wars and Fightings among you, come they not hence even of your Lusts?* To what a sad pass has Sin brought us, when the Ambition of one proud Tyrant shall cost Millions of Lives, Beggar whole Countries, and fill the rest with Terror and Confusion. In a word, if this be not the common Pest and Incendiary, the Mistress of Misrule, the Author of all our Mischiefs, the Cause of all our Calamities; then *where, and who is it?*

Whence proceeded that universal Deluge that washt away all Mankind, as it were at one Spring-tide, but from the *over-flowings of Ungodliness?* 'Twas Sin that pluck'd up the Flood-gates and let it in upon the Earth. What *turned the Cities of* Sodom *and* Gomorrha *into ashes, but wickedness that burneth like fire?*

But if these Instances seem too remote, of too long standing, and therefore too uncertain to affect our unbelieving Hearts, we shall not need to look so far back; there being numberless of a much fresher date, and many which our own experience can furnish us with to the same sad purpose. All the Judgments both publick and private which we ever read or heard of, all the

surprising

surprising Accidents and sad Disasters, all the Spectacles of Horror, which every Day in some place or other produces in such plenty, that we may easily come to the knowledge of them, and cannot sometimes (tho' we would) decline or overlook them; serve as a *Cloud of Witnesses* to attest and proclaim the Point we are upon, *viz.* the pernicious Influences of Sin. We need not look out for Objects of this kind, they too often meet us at our Doors, and cross us in our Streets. Sickness and Poverty, Trouble and sore Travail, are the most familiar Spectacles in Nature; and we need not go to Prisons or Gallies, to Hospitals or Pesthouses to find them; the whole Earth being one continued Scene of Misery and Sorrow; or what deserves the greatest pity of all, sorry lying short-liv'd Pleasures, which will certainly and suddenly end in unthought of, and therefore more unsufferable Torments.

With what acute Pains, and lingring Maladies are our very Bodies often afflicted? There is not one Vessel, or part of them, but may be, and often is made the Seat of some Pain or Distemper sufficient to blast the Pleasure, and sower the Enjoyments of our whole Life: Of all which it may be truly said, either as to the immediate or primary Cause, *Our Bones are full of the Sins of our Youth.*

But how much more are our Souls expos'd? how open do they lie to the secret but searching Strokes of a provok'd God? *The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmities, but a wounded Spirit who can bear?* How often do the *Arrows of God stick fast in us, the Poison whereof drinketh up our Spirits?* One while we are perplext with distracting Doubts, another terrify'd with tormenting Fears; anon over-

whelm'd with mortal Sadness, and *walk softly in the Bitterness of our Souls.* And how often is Conscience let loose upon us to convince us of Guilt, and amuse us *with a fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation*, so firmly are Sin and Sorrow combin'd, so fully is that Sentence verify'd on fallen Man, *Job* 14. 22. *But his Flesh upon him shall have pain, and his Soul within him shall mourn.*

And where can we lay the blame? whom can we charge as the procurer of our Sufferings, the source of all our Sorrows? 'Tis not that Nature (as some fondly dream) is a Stepdame to Man, and uses him worse than the rest of her Family; nor does God *despise the Work of his Hands*, and delight *to afflict the Children of Men*, much less *doth Affliction come forth of the Ground, or Trouble spring out of the Dust; tho' Man be born to trouble as the Sparks fly upwards*; but if we will assign the true Cause, and lay the fault in its proper place; *Jer.* 4. 18. *Thy ways and thy doings have procured those things, this is thy Wickedness because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto the Heart*; and consequently this should be the burthen of our Complaint (if we complain at all) *Lam.* 5. 16. *Wo unto us that we have sinned; for this our Heart is faint, for these things our Eyes are dim.*

But yet there is one Evil still behind, and of all the most infallibly certain. *For the wages of sin is death, and the sting of death is sin.* This is of all Enemies the most frightful to Nature, but to a Sinner (while *yet in his Sins*) unconceivably terrible. This is the First-born of Sin, and its most genuine undoubted Off-spring. *For Sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death past upon all forasmuch as all have sinned.* It could never have got entrance, much less footing here, if

if Sin had not open'd the breach and so brought its first Begotten into the World, nor could it have fasten'd upon us, till thus disarm'd, *bound Hand and Foot*, and laid at its Mercy. But now it reigns without Controul, finds us an easie unresisting Prey, and sweeps us away by Shoals. *Job* 24. 19. *As draught and heat consume the snow-waters, so doth the grave those which have sinned*; the Grave we are sure will devour our Bodies, and 'tis well if our Souls escape the more cruel Jaws of the *Bottomless-pit*; the infinitely more bitter Pains of *the second Death*.

And now is Sin with all this frightful train a contemptible Foe? Is this a laughing Matter? A thing to be mockt at? Are such edged Tools fit to be play'd with? And is he not worse than *Mad, who casteth these Firebrands, Arrows, and Death, and saith, am I not in Sport?* It may well stir our Sorrows, raise our Anger to the heighth of Indignation, awaken our Fears, or *provoke us to Jealousy*: But who could ever imagine it should tickle our Spleen, and *fill our Mouth with Laughter?* May we not truly say of *this Laughter it is Mad, and of this Mirth what doth it?*

One would think we have seen enough already to change our Note, and affect us as the Case and the Apostle requires, *Ja.* 4. 9. *Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to heaviness.* But we have not seen the worst of it yet. Those I have hitherto recounted, are but the first Acts of this Tragedy; but the beginning of Sorrows, the last and saddest is still behind; wherein its accursed Power and Malignity are seen in utmost perfection; *that Sin might appear exceeding sinful.* I mean not only *in the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous*

Judgment of God (for who knoweth the Power of his Wrath?) But in the Death and Passion of Christ; the blackest Tragedy that ever was acted, and (all things consider'd) even Hell it self, the Capital Seat of Sin, where it sits in Triumph, and displays its frightful Conquests; cannot present us with a more astonishing Instance of its fatal and destructive Fury. For what is the Ruine of some created Beings, were they an hundred times more than they are, were it the whole Creation together compar'd with the Sufferings of the Eternal *Son of God?* One drop of whose precious Blood is of greater value than the whole Mass of Nature. Let us but hear him crying to us from the Cross in those pathetick Words, *Lam.* 1. 12. *Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by, behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow---- Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger? From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them.* Let us steadily view it in his *Agonies* and *Torments*, in his *bloody Sweat*, and *dying Pangs*, let us attentively hear it in his *strong Cries* and *last Groans*, there let us *behold its Countenance*, there let us *hear its Voice*, and then tell me if its *Voice be sweet, and its Countenance comely*, or rather the one the most ghastly Sight, the other the most dismal Sound that ever wounded the Eyes, or pierc't the Ears of the Sons of Men.

And if Sin could make such cruel Havock on his not only *Innocent* but *Divine* Person, where it had nothing of its own to fasten upon, where nothing could stick but by Imputation from us: (*for the Prince of this World cometh*, says our Saviour before his Passion, *and hath nothing in me.*) How will it rage in its own Element? How fiercely will it prey on such suitable Fuel, as sinful *Dust*

and

and Ashes, which is *like Stubble fully dry before the devouring fire*: And to use our Blessed Lord's own Words upon this very Occasion, *Luk.* 23. 31. *For if they have done these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

And now we must Charge either God or Man with the weakest Folly. If Sin be indeed so light a Matter as the World makes of it, we might well ask that Question of *Judas*, *To what purpose is all this wast?* And conclude, that St. *Peter* gave him the best Advice, *Master spare thy self.* For what need all this ado about it? Sure God must be very free of his Son's Sufferings, and he no less of his Blood, and Life, and Glory; to expiate that at so dear a Rate, which might have been wip't away with a wet Finger. There would then have been abundant ground for that Query of the Prophet *Isaiah*, 63. 2. *Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel? and thy Garment like him that treadeth in the Wine-fat?* What need all this Blood and Sweat, this Toil and Travel, to take away Sin, since Man can so easily Laugh it away, and Jest it into nothing. Sure he must be strangely overseen to be at all this Expence for a thing of nought, and make such a solemn business of what the World reckons a meer trifle: If it were not a great and certain Truth, *Heb.* 9. 22. *That without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

Having gone thro' the several Heads propos'd; and shewn both the horrid Impiety, and wretched Folly of making a mock of Sin; it remains in the last place to make some Application of what has been said, as a close to the foregoing Discourse.

And my first Use shall be by way of Reflection upon what our daily Experience too fully acquaints us with of this kind. And indeed, did not that sadly assure us *that these things are so*, we might justly Question whether there were any such desperate Prophanenets to be found in the World. For if we abstractly consider the Nature of this Sin, as it is in it self, its Causes, and its Consequences: What a dreadful Guilt it involves us in; how highly it incenses the Divine Majesty; what slender Satisfaction it can yield; and how little Temptation we can have to commit it: And how utterly inconsistent

upon

upon all these Accounts, it must be as well with Reason, as Grace: We might almost conclude that no reasonable Creature can be Guilty of it; that it could never enter into the Heart of Man, to contrive so sure a Method for bringing down on his own Head swift Destruction, and sealing himself, (as it were) to the day of Damnation. That tho' he might be over-born by the strength of Corruption, the heat of Lust, or the wiles of Satan, and sometimes beguil'd by the deceitfulness of Sin; yet that he could never be so far bewitcht by this Sorceress, as to play with the Instruments of Death, and sport himself with his own Perdition. One would think 'twere enough for the most daring Sinner to venture upon the Commission of it, and so far to try the Patience of God; and not to widen the Breach, and make his Case desperate *by adding Rebellion to his Sin, and clapping his Hands against God.* That it might well suffice him to *enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*, without bidding defiance to his Maker, and playing the Wanton with his Crimes; and so rendring that an Act of highest Malice and Presumption, which might otherwise perhaps be imputed to a gust of Passion, or a slip of Infirmity. That any one should be so prodigal of his Soul, so greedy of Damnation, as not to lay aside *this meer superfluity of Naughtiness*, which might be spar'd without the least abatement even of his sinful Pleasure; and serves to no imaginable purpose but to inflame the reckoning, and leave him without excuse, is such a wild, extravagant, unaccountable Humor, as may even stagger our Faith to believe.

But there's no disputing against Matter of Fact; *ab esse ad posse*, is an undeniable conclusion; and Reason how plausible soever must be silenc't when Experience plainly confronts it: For I may truly say with *Job* 17. 2. *Are there not mockers with me, and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation?* Do we not see, and hear every day the licentious Sallies of this impious Phrenzy; which proves St. *Jude* no less a Prophet than an Apostle, *v.* 18. *That there should be mockers in the last time who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.* From the swarm of which Vermin wherewith we are infested, 'tis plain,

plain, that we are fallen into the dregs of time, the Sink of Ages, *upon whom the ends of the World are come.* For how many are there amongst us, who to use that Expression in *Job, Drink up scorning like water?* Who greedily catching at every occasion to shew their Wit, and bravingly make sport of any mention of Sin? Who never went about to encounter it by a serious Reproof, but found Champions enow to engage him, and elude his Reasonings, or Reproofs, by a profane and wanton Drollery.

And if this were the worst, if they were content to act only upon the defensive, we might hope there were some small remainder of Modesty. But that's not enough to approve their Zeal, and forwardness in their Master's Cause; unless they become the Aggressors, make the Challenge, and even force their vile Opinions upon all Companies; and to our shame be it spoken, there are found but few who dare make Head against them, while *they bend their Tongue as their Bow for Lies, few are valiant for the Truth upon Earth*; few but who either by a shameful silence betray the Cause of God, and so purely join with his Enemies; or else oppose so faintly, as if they had a mind to be overcome, and so embolden them *to further Ungodliness whereby wicked Men and Seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.* Which brings me to

The 2*d* part of the Charge, which I fear will reach most of us, *viz.* That if we are not Principals in this high Crime by an actual Prophaneness, yet we are Accessories to it by failing in our known Duty, and *giving the Adversary occasion to Insult and Blaspheme.* Were there not a general failure in this Respect, 'tis impossible this pestilent Humour should get to such an head, and have so wide a spread amongst us. For having (as I have shewn) no shadow of Reason, no spark of Common Sense, no glimmering of Wit, and nothing but Noise and Nonsense, Laughter and Impudence to support it, it would soon be baffled, did it meet with any vigorous Opposition.

For could any one do we think play the Frantick so wildly, affect such a ridiculous Singularity as to make sport

sport with that, at which all about him express the utmost Horror, and Indignation? Durst the boldest Reprobate trifle with that whereat all his Neighbours tremble? Play with that Cockatrice, from which he sees all besides him flee as from a fiery flying Serpent. Is it possible, that Men who are made of one Blood, and cast in the same Mould, and posset with the same Principles, should so widely differ in their Sentiments, and Demeanor, or if they did, they'd have more Wit and Manners than to shew it, did we express that just Indignation which the Case requires. 'Tis certain we are more influenc't by Example than so, pay more deference to other Mens Sense, and are rather too apt to think, and act as those about us. For Instance, did we ever know any Man in his Senses go laughing or dancing to a Funeral, and interrupt the mournful Solemnity with merry Frolicks? Whom did we ever see that was not Mad, or Drunk, play apish Tricks at a publick and terrible Execution, and endeavour to raise in the Spectators an Unnatural Mirth upon so sad an Occasion, while all the rest Sigh and shake their Heads; and tho' *Eliphaz* tells *Job*, 5. 22. *At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh*, (that is be not dismay'd) I believe scarce any one has been known to make himself Merry with such publick Calamities.

From whence it is plain, that if others exprest that abhorrence of Sin, and zeal to Discountenance and Suppress it, that becomes us; the very lightest Wantons, if it were but for Shame of the World, would quickly refrain at least from *making a mock at it, Iniquity would* be forc't to *stop its Mouth*, and draw in its Head, if not with shame to go off the Stage. We should not see Mankind quite contrarily affected at the same thing; like *Democritus*, and *Heraclitus*, the one half Mourning, and the other Laughing at the wickedness of the Age. So that our sottish unconcern is the main cause of their outragious Madness; while we express no serious Affection they are emboldened to shew the utmost Contempt. Whereas did we demean our selves as the Case requires, their senseless Mirth would be soon quasht, or put out of Countenance: When Sinners entice us, did we Answer as *Joseph* to his Mistress, *How can I do this great Wickedness and Sin against God?* it would soon awaken their Conscience; and much more if we threaten'd 'em with the Sword of the Magistrate (and if this will not do, make our actual Appeal to him) in those Words of the Apostle, with which I shall conclude, *Ro.* 13. 4. *But if thou do that which is Evil be afraid; for he beareth not the Sword in vain: For he is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doeth Evil.*

FINIS.